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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

INTELLIGENCE

3 OCT 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR Mr. Richard Ober, National Security Council
25X1A [redacted] Intelligence Community Staff

SUBJECT: Status of IC Staff Study of Reporting of Uncertainty In Intelligence

Reference: Minutes of NSCIC/WG meeting dated 2 July 1975

The NSCIC/WG originally sought information on the reporting of uncertainty data in current national intelligence products because serious questions exist as to the reliability and meaning of many of the figures used in national intelligence estimates. The IC Staff has so far briefed the NSCIC/WG on the work it is doing to (a) study what the community is doing to improve part of its uncertainty data, or (b) conduct research into better methods of analyzing uncertainty.

Mr. Ellsworth stressed in the meeting of the NSCIC/WG on 2 July that the current IC Staff paper on expressing uncertainties in technical judgements would answer only a small part of the requirement for progress in this area.

This comment needs to be followed up. I am certain that you both agree that the lack of proper uncertainty data represents a critical problem in current national intelligence production. In far too many cases, consumers have no way of knowing the reliability of the data they are given.

Further, the community seems to have failed to really address the problem in rigorous analytic detail in many areas of key importance to SALT and MBFR. Accordingly, when it does provide uncertainty data, it is difficult to understand what level of analytic effort went into the figures or to place high confidence in the result.

Soviet strategic yields, CEPs, and silo hardness are critical examples of such problem areas. So are Warsaw Pact military manning, equipment strength, and readiness data.

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Accordingly, I think it would be useful if at the next meeting of the NSCIC/WG, or in a separate staff paper, the IC Staff could report on progress in:

-- measuring the extent to which explicit quantitative statements of uncertainty are provided for all figures shown in the NIEs, SNIEs, and NIAMs.

-- improving uncertainty data on force strengths and force readiness as well as on technical data.

-- providing explicit summary statements of the major limitations and uncertainties in the intelligence provided in NIEs, SNIEs, and NIAMs.

-- correcting the grave problems which have existed in past uncertainty estimates because of (a) the general lack of familiarity within the community with uncertainty data, and (b) the resistance of untrained personnel to replace loose adjectival estimates with modern analytic techniques.

for Anthony H. Cordesman
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